

How the phrase
"IN GOD WE TRUST"
came to be on the coins
and paper money
of the United States



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Matthew H. Rothert.

"IN GOD WE TRUST"



THE REV. MR. WATKINSON was troubled. In his small parish at Ridleyville, Pennsylvania, he brooded over the low ebb of Union fortunes after Fort Sumter and Bull Run. He deplored the godlessness of a nation seven months in civil war.

One cheerless November day in 1861 he sat down at the antique desk in his rectory and wrote a letter of singular eloquence to the Secretary of the Treasury.

"One fact touching our currency has hitherto been seriously overlooked," he wrote. "I mean the recognition of the Almighty God in some form in our coins. What if our Republic were now shattered beyond reconstruction? Would not the antiquaries of succeeding centuries rightly reason from our past that we were a heathen nation?"

Proposing a motto on the theme of *God, Liberty, Law*, he concluded, "This would relieve us from the ignominy of heathenism. This would place us openly under the Divine protection we have personally claimed. From my heart I have felt our national shame in disowning God as not the least of our present national disasters."

The Secretary of the Treasury was Salmon P. Chase, one of Lincoln's ablest cabinet members. Later he was to become Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, and it was in his honor that the Chase National Bank of the City of New York was named in 1877.

The Secretary, deep in problems of war financing, read this letter from the Rev. M. R. Watkin-



TWO CENT PIECE, 1864

First coin on which the motto
"In God We Trust" appeared

son and promptly recognized the merit of his plea. Within a week he had dispatched a note to the Director of the Mint in Philadelphia, James Pollock.

"No nation can be strong except in the strength of God," the note read, echoing the sentiments of the clergyman, "or safe except in His defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins.

"You will cause a device to be prepared without unnecessary delay with a motto expressing in the fewest and tersest words possible this national recognition."

The Director of the Mint acted quickly on the Secretary's order. Before the year was out a bronze pattern for a \$10 gold piece with the motto *God Our Trust* had been submitted. Shortly thereafter, *God and Our Country* was suggested. But it was not until 1864 that *In God We Trust* first appeared on a United States coin, a two-cent piece. Salmon P. Chase himself had proposed this inscription. After 1864 it appeared on many of our coins but only since 1938, with the issuance of the Jefferson five-cent

piece, have all coins minted by the government borne this simple affirmation of a nation's faith, *In God We Trust*.

PAPER MONEY

Ninety-three years later, in October 1957, one dollar Silver Certificates bearing the motto, *In God We Trust*, were placed in circulation.

The suggestion to include *In God We Trust* on our currency was presented to the Secretary of the Treasury, George W. Humphrey, in November 1953 by Matthew H. Rothert of Camden, Arkansas. Mr. Rothert's idea came to him a few months earlier while attending church one Sunday morning in Chicago. As the collection plate was being passed, it occurred to him that only the coins in the plate had this motto. He then thought that since our paper money has a much wider circulation abroad than our coins, a message about this country's faith in God could be easily carried throughout the world if it were on United States currency.

Secretary Humphrey favored the idea but felt that Congressional sanction was desirable. In March 1955, through Mr. Rothert's efforts, bills to this effect were introduced into the Senate by Senator Fulbright of Arkansas and into the House of Representatives by Congressmen Bennett of Florida and Harris of Arkansas. The bill which was approved by President Eisenhower on July 11, 1955 specified ". . . that at such time as new dies for the printing of currency are adopted . . . by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, the dies shall bear . . . the inscription *In God We Trust*, and thereafter this inscription shall appear on all United States currency and coins." The new dies and machinery for the printing of paper money were not adopted by the Bureau until 1957. While the one dollar certificates are the first notes officially to bear this inscription, it will appear eventually on all our currency.